

Message Text

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INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMCONSUL IBADAN

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USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 LAGOS 14939

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, NI

SUBJECT: BIAFRA REVISITED: JOURNEYS TO THE EAST

1. SUMMARY. THIS CABLE IS THE IMPRESSIONISTIC REPORT OF EMBOFFS WHO HAVE RECENTLY VISITED ALL FOUR STATES IN THE OLD EASTERN REGION. ONE RETURNS FROM THE EAST WITH MANY IMPRESSION, THE STRONGEST OF WHICH IS THAT THIS AREA HAS NOT BENEFITTED AS GREATLY AS THE REST OF NIGERIA DURING THE ERA OF THE PETRONAIRA. THERE ARE ALSO GRAVE PROBLEMS FOR THE FUTURE OF DEVELOPMENT IN THE AREA. AMERICANS REMAIN QUITE POPULAR IN THE EAST AND THERE IS A CONSTANT INTEREST IN THE REOPENING OF AN AMERICAN CONSULATE, BUT ALWAYS IN "MY TOWN." END SUMMARY.

2. DURING THE PAST SEVERAL MONTHS, EMBOFFS HAVE TRAVELED THROUGHT THE FOUR STATES OF THE OLD EASTERN REGION--ANAMBRA, CROSS RIVER, IMO AND RIVERS. DURING THESE TRIPS WE HAVE DEVELOPED STRONG IMPRESSIONS OF THE DIFFERENCES AS WELL AS
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THE SIMILARITIES OF THESE STATES. THIS TELEGRAM WILL PROVIDE SOME GENERAL IMPRESSIONS OF THE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CLIMATE IN THE AREA.

3. POLITICAL ACTIVITY IN THE EAST. THE POLITICIANS IN THE EAST DO NOT APPEAR TO BE AS ACTIVE AS THOSE IN EITHER THE NORTH OR THE WEST. TWO REASONS WERE CONSISTENTLY CITED FOR

THESE PHENOMENA: A) HAVING BEEN BURNED ONCE (ESPECIALLY THE IBOS), THERE IS LITTLE DESIRE TO RETURN TO ACTIVE POLITICS; B) HAVING RESIGNED THEMSELVES TO MAKING MONEY IN THE BUSINESS WORLD, MANY OLD AND POTENTIAL POLITICAH)
LEADERS HAVE FOUND THEY ENJOY IT AND ARE RELUCTANT TO SEEK ACTIVE POLITICAL ROLES. THESE COMMENTS NOTWITHSTANDING, THERE ARE A FEW WELL-KNOWN EASTERNERS WHO HAVE APPEARED IN THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY (CA) SUCH AS MATTHEW T. MBU, BRIGADIER GEORGE KURUBO AND LT. COL. HILARY NJOKU. HOWEVER, WHEN THESE NAMES WERE RAISED PEOPLE DID NOT APPEAR TO SEE THEM AS LEADERS IN THE EAST, BUT RATHER AS WELL KNOWN POLITICIANS WHO HAD WON THEIR SEATS THROUGH THEIR INFLUENCE IN LOCAL AREAS.

4. WHITHER THE EAST IN THE RETURN TO CIVILIAN RULE? A DIFFICULT QUESTION TO ANSWER. THE MOST COMMON VIEW WHICH WAS EXPLICITLY STATED BY ONE IBO WAS THAT THE EAST WILL BROKER ITSELF TO THE HIGHEST BIDDER IN THE NEW POLITICAL STRUCTURE. IN THE FINAL ANALYSIS, THE NORTHERNERS ARE PREFERRED TO THE YORUBAS. IN LINE WITH THIS LATTER OBSERVATION, IT APPEARS THAT A NUMBER OF NORTHERN POLITICIANS HAVE BEEN ACTIVELY POLITICKING IN THE EAST, BUT THAT THE YORUBAS HAVE NOT.

5. REINTEGRATION OF THE IBOS. IN LAGOS ONE HAS THE
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IMPRESSION THAT THE IBOS HAVE BEEN QUITE SUCCESSFUL REINTEGRATING THEMSELVES INTO NIGERIAN SOCIETY SINCE THE CIVIL WAR. ONE FINDS A DISTINCT
BANIOSIOE IMPRESSION IN THE EAST. THERE IS A WIDESPREAD FEELING THAT THE EAST IN GENERAL AND THE IBOS IN PARTICULAR ARE STILL BEING PUNISHED FOR THEIR ROLE IN THE CIVIL WAR. IT WOULD APPEAR TO US THAT PERHAPS THOSE IBOS WHO LEFT THE EAST HAVE FAIRED BETTER AS INDIVIDUALS THAN THE IBOS WHO REMAINED AT HOME AND AS A GROUP HAVE SUFFERED FOR THE "SINS" OF THE CIVIL WAR.

6. AS A FOOTNOTE, WE SHOULD PASS ON THE VIEW OF ONE AMERICAN OBASERVER WHO LIVES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NSUKKA. HE SAYS THAT WITHIN THE INTELLECTUAL/ACADEMIC COMMUNITY THERE IS A STRONG FEELING THAT THE IBOS WHO LEFT THE EAST TO REJOIN THE FMG AND SEEK THEIR FUTURES IN THE FEDERAL BUREAUCRACY WERE "TRAITORS." EMBOFFS DID NOT HEAR THIS VIEW EXPRESSED ELSEWHERE.

7. ON THE POSITIVE SIDE, THE LAST TWO YEARS HAVE APPARENTLY WITNESSED THE REDUCTION OF FEDERAL TROOPS THROUGHOUT THE EAST IN IBO AND NON-IBG AREAS. REFERRED TO BY SOME AS

"OCCUPATION TROOPS," THEIR ROADBLOCKS AND INSPECTIONS

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WERE APPARENTLY A TREMENDOUS IRRITANT TO THE CIVILIAN
POLULATION. AS ONE IBO SAID TO AN EMBOFF, IF YOU HAD THE
SLIGHTEST RUN-IN WITH THE SOLDIERS, THEY WOULD "BEAT THE
HELL OUT OF YOU." WHILE THERE ARE STILL SOLDIERS
AROUND THEY NO LONGER ACT LIKE OCCUPIERS AND THEY WERE MUCH
LESS OBVIOUS THAN THEY REPORTEDLY WERE IN THE PAST.

8. STATE GOVERNMENTS. THE QUALITY OF STATE GOVERNMENTS IN
THE EAST WAS QUITE CHECKERED. IMO, THE NEW IBO STATE, HAS
AN IMPRESSIVE COLLECTION OF YOUNG CIVIL SERVANTS BASED IN
AN ALMOST UNLIVABLE TOWN STRUGGLING TO BECOME A CITY.
PERHAPS THE DIFFICULTIES OF OWERRI AND THE OPPORTUNITIES
OF A NEW STATE GOVERNMENT ATTRACT MANY YOUNGER CAPABLE
PEOPLE WHO SEE THEIR FUTURES BLOCKED BY OLD LINE CIVIL
SERVANTS IN OTHER STATES.

9. BY CONTRAST, EMBOFFS WERE UNIMPRESSED BY THE CIVIL
SERVANTS IN ANAMBRA STATE. THIS CAN BE EXPLAINED IN PART
BECAUSE SO MANY OF THE CIVIL SERVANTS REMAINED WITH THE
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GOVERNMENT IN ENUGU THROUGHOUT THE PERIOD OF THE OLD EASTERN REION GOVERNMENT, THE BIAFRAN GOVERNMENT, THE CORRUPT ASIKA REGIME AND NOW THE NEW ANAMBRA STATE GOVERNMENT. REPORTEDLY, THE OLDEST PERMANENT SECRETARY IN NIGERIA IS IN ENUGU. IN THE WORDS OF ONE OFFICIAL, THE CIVIL SERVANTS ARE OLD AND TIRED; THEY HAVE BEEN BUFFETED BY THE WINDS OF TOO MANY POLITICAL CHANGES.

10. CROSS RIVER STATE FALLS SOMEWHERE IN BETWEEN WITH A NUMBER OF YOUNG ENERGETIC OFFICIALS, BUT LACKING IN DEPTH OF TALENT. ONE YOUNG IBO IN ENUGU COMMENTED THAT CROSS RIVER, UNLIKE ANAMBRA, STILL ATTRACTS QUALIFIED YOUNG OFFICIALS WHILE IN OTHER AREAS THEY TEND TO LOOK TOWARD, THE BUSINESS WORLD. PERHAPS CROSS RIVERS' GREATEST HANDICAP, ASIDE FROM ITS PHYSICAL ISOLATION, IS THAT IT LACKS A SUFFICIENTLY LARGE POOL OF TALENTED MANPOWER, OR MONEY, FROM WHICH TO DRAW.

11. WE DID NOT HAVE SUFFICIENT CONTACT WITH RIVERS STATE OFFICIALS TO MAKE ANY GENERAL COMMENTS.

12. FINANCE. THE STATES IN EASTERN NIGERIA, AS ALL THE STATES, ARE DEPENDENT ON THE FMG FOR THE LION'S SHARE (80-85 PERCENT) OF THEIR REVENUES. THERE IS JUSTIFIABLE CONCERN AMONG STATE GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS THAT THIS YEAR'S FEDERAL BUDGET CUTS INDICATE FUTURE AUSTERITY WITH STAGNATION, OR PERHAPS DECLINE, IN FEDERAL BUDGETARY SUPPORT. THIS IS A SPECIAL PROBLEM IN THE EAST SINCE THESE STATES HAVE NOT BENEFITED AS MUCH FROM THE ERA OF THE PETRONAIRA AS THE REST OF NIGERIA.

13. ONE REACTION OF STATE AND LOCAL OFFICIALS TO THIS SITUATION WAS TO TALK OF TAPPING THE LOCAL TAX BASE.
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WHILE POTENTIAL MAY EXIST IN THE LARGER TOWNS, THERE ARE NO TAX COLLECTION MECHANISMS IN PLACE, NOR DO THERE APPEAR TO BE PLANS FOR ANY.

14. THE FMG IS PUSHING PRIVATE BANKS TO OPEN MORE BRANCHES IN THE STATES AND POSSIBLY LEND FUNDS DIRECTLY TO THE STATES. NONETHELESS, SINCE THE STATES DEPEND ON THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT FOR FINANCING, ANY BANK LOANS TO THE STATES WOULD ULTIMATELY HAVE TO BE UNDERWRITTEN BY THE FMG AND WOULD BE SIMPLY ANOTHER FEDERAL SUBSIDY.

15. ECONOMIC ACTIVITY. WITH THE EXCEPTION OF CROSS RIVER WHICH LIVES ON THE OIL INDUSTRY, THE FINANCIAL PICTURE

DESCRIBED ABOVE HAS SERIOUS IMPLICATIONS FOR ECONOMIC ACTIVITY. IN THE REST OF THE STATES, ASIDE FROM THE UBIQUITOUS IBO TRADE, MOST ACTIVITY IS PETRONAIRA CONSTRUCTION DIRECTLY OR INDIRECTLY FUNDED BY THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT. THERE IS A POTENTIAL FOR SOME PRIVATE INVESTMENT BUT, GIVEN THE "TRADING MENTALITY" OF THE IBOS WHO DOMINATE THE AREA, MUCH OF THIS LOOSE CASH REMAINS UNFOCUSED FOR INVESTMENT PURPOSES.

16. THERE ARE FEW INDICATIONS THAT THE STATE GOVERNMENTS HAVE THE TALENT TO ORGANIZE OR DIRECT THIS WEALTH. PRIVATE BANKS WOULD PROBABLY CONCLUDE THAT AS FAR AS INVESTMENT IS CONCERNED, THE RISKS ARE TOO GREAT. THE PARASTATAL FINANCE INSTITUTIONS, E.G., ANAMBRA'S CENTRAL INVESTMENT COMPANY, ARE PROBABLY THE BEST HOPE BUT THE TASK IS ENORMOUS SINCE IT INVOLVES NOTHING LESS THAN TRANSFORMING TRADERS INTO INVESTORS.

18. IF THERE IS TO BE INVESTMENT, THE GREATEST NEED AND POTENTIAL IS IN AGRICULTURE AND LIGHT INDUSTRY. HOWEVER, THE DEVELOPMENT OF THESE SECTORS IS DEPENDENT ON THE REHABILITATION OF THE EAST'S ROAD NET WHICH IS NOT A

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CERTAINTY GIVEN THE GOVERNMENT'S BUDGETARY PROBLEMS, THE ROADS VARY FROM POOR TO ALMOST IMPASSABLE. ALTHOUGH THIS PROBLEM IS PARTIALLY ATTRIBUTABLE TO THE RAVAGES OF THE CIVIL

WAR, THE INADEQUACIES OF THE POST-WAR ADMINISTRATION, AT LEAST IN IBO AREAS, HAVE FURTHER COMPOUNDED THE PROBLEM WITH YEARS OF INADEQUATE DEVELOPMENT AND MAINTENANCE.

18. CONCLUSION. DESPITE THE EMPHASIS ON NEW STATES AND SMALLER ETHNIC GROUPS, THE IBOS REMAINS THE MOST IMPORTANT PEOPLE IN THE REGION. YET AT HOME THEY ARE MUCH LESS IMPRESSIVE THAN THE IBO BUSINESSMAN AND BUREAUCRATS ONE MEETS IN OTHER PARTS OF NIGERIA. PERHAPS, LIKE THE OVERSEAS CHINESE, MUCH OF THE CREAM OF THE SOCIETY IS DRAINED OFF SEEKING CAREERS IN OTHER AREAS. IF SO, AGAIN PERHAPS LIKE THE CHINESE, MUCH OF THE HOPE FOR PRIVATE INVESTMENT AND PROGRESS WILL BE THE GRADUAL RETURN OF MONEY AND INDIVIDUALS TO THE HOMELAND TO PUSH DEVELOPMENT.

19. THE CIVIL WAR IS OVER, YET IT REMAINS IN THE
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MINDS OF MANY WITH CASUAL REFERENCES TO "THE WAR." OF COURSE IT MEANS DIFFERENT THINGS TO DIFFERENT PEOPLE. THIS FEELING IS PERHAPS SYMBOLIZED BY MAY 27TH STREET IN ENUGU. ONE OF THE MAIN STREETS, IT WAS REPORTEDLY NAMED BY OJUKWU IN 1967 BECAUSE THAT WAS THE DATE THAT THE CONSULTATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE EASTERN REGION CALLED UPON HIM TO DECLARE ITS INDEPENDENCE. IT STILL BEARS THAT NAME BECAUSE TO THE VICTORS IN THE WAR, IT IS THE DATE ON WHICH GOWON DECLARED THE CREATION OF 12 STATES, SYMBOLIZING THE NEW NIGERIA, BUT SPURRING THE IBOS TO DECLARE THEIR INDEPENDENCE.

20. AMERICANS REMAIN QUITE POPULAR IN THE AREA. EVERYONE WAS INTERESTED IN THE OPENING OF A CONSULATE, ALTHOUGH WITH FOUR STATES THE QUESTION IS NOT ONLY WHETHER BUT ALSO WHERE.
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